

SELF-EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN RURAL KUMAON REGION OF UTTARAKHAND POST COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

There is a need to understand the several interlinked issues of out-migration and in-migration in such a pandemic situation, especially for a state like Uttarakhand where the reverse migration is quite high. With a slowdown in the economy worldwide Uttarakhand state is no exception to it and to top that inadequate employment opportunities have increased the challenge of the government. The present paper aims to find self-employment opportunities that can be generated by either no or very little investment. The level of investment is a necessary prerequisite because most of the population do not have enough resources to start a business. Based on observation, interaction with local people and talking with the experts the present paper presents a number of employment opportunities that can be harnessed with available resources, very low or no investment at all and existing level of knowledge or minimum with minimum training.

KEYWORDS: Self-Employment, Covid19, Migration

Received: Jan 26, 2022; **Accepted:** Feb 16, 2022; **Published:** Feb 26, 2022; **Paper Id.:** IJECRJUN20224

INTRODUCTION

The unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic has entailed boundless difficulties and brought austerity to migrant workers all over the world, including India. The job losses and fear of the virus pushed millions of migrants into a panic situation and force them to return to their homes under distress to far-flung areas in rural areas. The visuals of affliction that migrants encountered while returning were seen across railway stations, bus stations, highways and on the roads in different parts of India.

It is estimated that about 12 million migrants returned to their places of origin during the initial period of the pandemic (**Indian Express 2020**) mainly to the states. The number of migrant workers who returned to their homes in Uttarakhand during the pandemic was estimated at about 2.15 lakh. The returning migrants shared their problems, distress and pain, loss of livelihood and income, government support, reasons to return, future plans etc.

Hence, there is a need to understand the several interlinked issues of out-migration and in-migration in such a pandemic situation while formulating policies and strategies to arrest such distressing forms of migration in future.

UTTARAKHAND

Historically, this region has been considered a famous place for its calm and quiet environment, known as the land of gods. The mountains, rivers, Himalayas, grasslands are the main sources of attraction. The economy of the region comprises all three sectors; however, the most dominating sector is the industry in the plain areas and agriculture is the main occupation of most of the population in rural areas. Economic growth in the state has been reported 9.8%, 7.8%, 6.9% (Base Year 2011-12) during 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19 which is higher than the All

India (7.1%, 7.2% and 6.8% respectively) (Uttarakhand Budget Analysis 2021-22). The secondary sector dominates in the state economy, and contributed almost half 4.9% in its Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in 2019-20, with a 37% share of the manufacturing sector. But apart from these, a number of self-employment opportunities are available in the state and the state government is continuously taking steps to trap these. The present study aims to unearth the vast opportunities that the state harnesses which can be used for the benefit of the migrants.

MIGRATION

Historically, the movement of people takes place primarily because of lag in the development of different regions and often people migrate from backward regions to relatively developed regions for better employment and livelihood opportunities. This large movement of labour is due to unequal development trajectories. Similarly, the hill areas are in a more precarious position compared to plain or lowland areas in terms of economic opportunities and infrastructure development. These specificities often expose the people in these fragile regions to food shortages and other locational disadvantages.

The individualistic approach of migration which is credited to (Todaro 1969) and extension of this approach to the household approach (Stark 1980,1991) considered migration to be essentially an economic phenomenon and has positive consequences. This and many other migration theories are closely linked with the social, economic and cultural transactions that have profound implications on migrants and their families. Migration is increasingly perceived as an effective strategy for a livelihood that can help alleviate poverty in mountain areas in particular and other under-developed areas in general.

However, the situation in Uttarakhand was already not very good and now after the pandemic, it has become alarming. The lack of job opportunities has forced most of the migrants to return back to their place of work. Also, the regularly occurring natural calamities are not in favour of the state. But even after all these drawbacks, a wide range of employment opportunities are available in rural areas of Uttarakhand. There is only a need to harness them. In this paper, an attempt has been made to find out employment opportunities based on observation and informal interviews with local people of various places in Uttarakhand.

OUT MIGRATION IN UTTARAKHAND

The data from the following table shows the district-wise out-migration of people from Uttarakhand. The table is divided into two categories of individual migration and migration with families.

Table 1.1: District-Wise Out-Migration

District	Migrated Alone (%)	Migrated with Families(%)
Almora	84.4	14.2
Bageshwar	70.5	13.7
Chamoli	75.5	18.9
Champawat	68.7	12.3
Pauri Garhwal	82.3	12.3
Dehradun	92.7	7.3

Haridwar	77.6	12.8
Nainital	70.3	20.1
Pithoragarh	67.6	21.0
Rudraprayag	46.3	25.9
Tehri Garhwal	62.1	25.4
Udham Singh Nagar	69.8	27.7
Uttarkashi	65.9	18.8
Total	72.1	18.0

Source: Uttarakhand Human Development Report Survey, 2017

The table shows that Dehradun has the highest percentage of people migrating outside Uttarakhand and Rudraprayag has the lowest percentage in the category of people migrating alone. In migration with families, Udham Singh Nagar has the highest percentage and Dehradun has the lowest percentage.

In Migration in Uttarakhand During Covid 19

The various sources give an approx no. of 3,57,536 migrants who have returned during the Covid pandemic. Although the district-wise data is available for certain districts only sources have shown that as many as 2,52,687 have decided to stay back (**Upadhyay 2020**). Providing employment to this large population is a challenging task as already there is a lack of job opportunities, low income and harsh climatic conditions in hill areas of Uttarakhand.

Table 1.2: District-Wise In-migration in Uttarakhand

District	In migrants (%)
Almora	27.97
Pauri	17.84
Udham Singh Nagar	0.66
Dehradun	0.29
Haridwar	0.11

Source: Uttarakhand Migration Commission Report

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Data released by the Uttarakhand migration commission in July mentioned that over 2.15 lakh people had returned to their homes in Uttarakhand during the Covid-19 pandemic. Hindustan Times says, “Uttarakhand estimated two-thirds of migrants have returned to the place of work (Suparna Roy). According to express news service over 53000 migrants returned. Most of these people belong to the hospitality sector and have lost their jobs due to ongoing restrictions amid the raging pandemic. Around 39% of people belong to hospitality centres followed by students (12.9%), manual workers (11.1%) and others from various fields.

This employable youth is a big challenge for the government and thus it becomes important for them to discover new methods of working with the existing resources and knowledge. Innumerable jobs like agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, tourism etc. have already been discussed in previously conducted studies.

The present paper will discuss employment opportunities that do not require much investment and training and can be easily practised without any government help. The whole of Uttarakhand is famous for its scenic beauty resulting in tourism activities throughout the year. There is a possibility of developing circuit tourism in the area. This similar type of model is followed in Kerala where a number of similar places are linked together and the government or travel agencies offer various travel packages. In Uttarakhand also the pilgrimage circuit, the Prayag circuit where all 5 Prayags can be linked within a package, the Shiva circuit, circuit for adventure activities etc. can be developed. For circuit tourism whatever package the tourist chooses, he can visit those places. Similar circuits can be developed for adventurous activities and tracking activities etc. Waste management and recycling is another opportunity that can be developed in rural areas. Solid waste management is a challenge in almost all the Nagar Nigams and Gram panchayats. This will help in maintaining the beauty as well as the waste management of the area. The masses can be trained to segregate and treat different types of waste like wet waste, dry waste, bio-degradable waste, medical waste, hazardous waste etc. Nainital town is famous for candle making which even generates employment and requires minimal training. This can be extended up to other areas as well. This industry requires minimum training and providing proper marketing facilities can be of great help to the local masses who have returned after the COVID pandemic.

Mushroom cultivation is yet another opportunity that can be started with zero investment and no training at all. One case from Ramgarh block in District Nainital said that he lost everything in a natural calamity and is now working from scratch. He started mushroom cultivation and now his whole family is engaged in the business. Some other cases also reported that after returning from their place of work when they did not get any help from the government and they started mushroom cultivation and now the business is flourishing. The state is endowed with ample sunlight and rivers which can be used for electricity generation. Instead of a big set up small dams and chakbandis will help in electricity production, irrigation purposes and diversion of water from high to low availability areas. The rivers with huge water capacities can also be used for irrigation purposes, electricity generation, other industrial use etc.

The establishment of solar parks is also an option that can be thought of but requires capital and skilled manpower. To connect people with self-employment and solve their various problems, camps for self-employment should be organized by the government in respected areas. Reverse migration in Uttarakhand has created a situation where people are returning to their villages which were called Ghost villages. But as per Prof Bhagwan Singh Bisht, Professor of Sociology, D.S.B Campus Nainital, these villages should be called Divine villages because people come here for religious ceremonies regularly and most have taken shelter in these homes from COVID. So, if there is the presence of God then how can these be called ghost villages. These villages have great opportunities for developing organic farming, medical tourism, medical gardens, agriculture tourism, rural homestay tourism, cultural activities, handicrafts, tourist guides, agro-processing etc.

The base for plains is hill areas and thus mountainous regions need to be revived. Because it is only after people stay here that the holistic development of the area can take place. All the three sectors in Uttarakhand are developing at a fast rate and for the primary sector, there are enough resources and opportunities to be harnessed with minimum training. Also, the state has a good literacy level, low poverty rate and even the growth rate in the state is comparatively high. These

strengths of the state should be used to replenish the rural economy of the state.

The reverse migrants are in search of jobs through various channels. Friends, relatives are the main sources to find jobs. It has been well documented that the job search route through informal channels, such as friends and relatives and familial ties play an important role in the migration process (Ioannides & Datcher Loury 2004). Even non-familial ties are emerging as an important source for accessing jobs in urban labour markets (Mitra, 2010). It has also been noted that migrant workers from poverty-stricken households are more likely to use informal job search routes. (Stark, 1995, Mitra 2004, 2010). These similar instances are also seen in the rural areas of Uttarakhand that people are mainly dependent on informal sources for job search. Government should conduct regular awareness camps regarding job opportunities that can be harnessed with minimum investment and through self.

The government has taken steps in this direction by establishing Palayan Aayog in 2017. This has focused mainly on the hospitality and service sectors. Certain other areas that government promises to focus on in future are horticulture, micro-food processing, animal husbandry, poultry, dairy farming etc. Apart from these, a number of activities are discussed above that can be developed both by the government as well as the individuals.

CONCLUSIONS

Uttarakhand is a state with unlimited natural resources and for inclusive development of the state, establishing small production units, cottage and small industries is necessary. To engage the large working population focusing on efficient labour-intensive techniques is the need of the hour. Rather than depending on the government for help people should develop alternative livelihood techniques that are mountain efficient. But as it is already clear from past experience, out-migration is mainly due to lack of employment opportunities and a low economic base. Therefore, it is necessary even for the government to take steps to provide sustainable employment opportunities.

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